

United Nations Biodiversity Conference
High-level Segment
“Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet”
Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, 14-15 November 2018

Introduction

Biodiversity and ecosystems services are essential for human well-being, economic activities and social priorities. Biodiversity underpins the provision of food, fibers and freshwater, and provides resilience to change, including climate change and natural disasters. Yet, biodiversity continues to decline in all regions of the world. Significant additional action is needed to address the continuing loss of biodiversity and to achieve the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In order to make the necessary shift, the importance of biodiversity needs to be understood and acted upon by relevant decision makers. Government policies and business practices need to adopt measures and approaches that recognize the value of biodiversity for economic and social prosperity. A central means to achieving this shift is to take actions to mainstream and integrate biodiversity in relevant economic sectors, as well as in cross-cutting national policies, such as development plans and processes, budgets, and economic policies. These kinds of actions are often referred to as “biodiversity mainstreaming”, which is generally understood as ensuring that biodiversity and the services it provides are appropriately and adequately factored into the policies and practices that impact it.

Despite the significant decisions and specific efforts, the extent to which actions are being taken to mainstream biodiversity at the national level appears to be lagging. There are likely several explanations for this. First, there continues to be a lack of understanding of the value of biodiversity for national economic and social interests and, thus, the failure to ensure that such value is considered in planning and decision making that could adversely impact biodiversity. Second, the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services is often not captured by markets. Third, the value of biodiversity may flow to beneficiaries other than those whose actions could potentially harm it. And fourth, the political benefits of protecting biodiversity are likely to be less clear to political leaders than taking action on matters such as the economy and jobs.

Integrating biodiversity within specific sectors

At the previous United Nations Biodiversity Conference, held in Cancun, Mexico, in 2016, ministers considered the mainstreaming of biodiversity with a particular focus on the agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism sectors, and the Conference of the Parties to the Convention adopted a decision on these sectors (decision XIII/3). In the same decision, the Conference of the Parties decided to consider, at its fourteenth meeting, the mainstreaming of biodiversity in the sectors of energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing, as well as health.

Thus, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference 2018, including the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and the high-level segment, to be held in Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt, will be considering action on the mainstreaming of biodiversity in these sectors. The Conference of the Parties will also launch a process for developing a new global biodiversity framework, to be adopted at its fifteenth meeting, which will be held in Beijing in 2020. The issue of mainstreaming biodiversity is certain to be of major significance to the new framework.

The energy and mining, infrastructure, and manufacturing and processing sectors comprise a wide variety of industries and activities. While they all depend, to varying degrees, on biodiversity and the ecosystem services that biodiversity underpins, all have potentially significant impacts on biodiversity. These three groups of sectors are closely interrelated. For example, new energy facilities make up a large part of projected future infrastructure. Materials and fuels may be extracted by mining, before being processed and used in manufacturing by other

industries. Infrastructure requires materials and energy for its construction, and in turn, is needed for their distribution.

Most of these sectors are expected to grow significantly through 2050 and beyond, and are at the core of national economic development growth forecasts. Such growth could have significant implications for biodiversity. For example, at the global level, infrastructure development is cited as one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss. The fragmentation effect of large linear infrastructure projects (such as roads), noise, water, soil and air pollution, water extraction and indirect or induced impacts associated with opening up previously inaccessible areas to human activity (both legal and illegal, such as poaching) can result in loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem services long after construction ends. Most of the new infrastructure over the next several decades will be built in or around cities, including large-scale development of new cities in many regions of the world.

Biodiversity is also fundamental to human health. It underpins a vast range of ecosystem services as sources of food, medicines, shelter, energy, livelihoods and economic development and contributes to the regulation of multiple ecosystem functions and processes, which are essential for nutrition and food security, clean air, the quantity and quality of fresh water, spiritual and cultural values, climate regulation, pest and disease regulation, and disaster risk reduction. Pathogens play a complex role in biodiversity and health, with regulating benefits in some contexts and threats to biodiversity and human health in others. Human-mediated changes in ecosystems, such as modified landscapes, intensive agriculture, and antimicrobial use, are increasing risks of transmission and impact of infectious disease. Land-use change, overharvesting, and habitat alteration and other drivers of biodiversity loss contribute to the emergence and prevalence of both non-communicable and communicable diseases, potentially posing major global health threats which cost hundreds of thousands of lives and tens of billions of dollars annually.

Given the potential impacts and dependencies (some indirect) that the sectors of infrastructure, energy and mining and manufacturing and processing, as well as health, pose on biodiversity, the mainstreaming of biodiversity considerations within these sectors is essential in ensuring the continued viability of these sectors as well as stemming the loss of biodiversity that underpins these and other sectors, and sustainable development more broadly.

Possible actions for mainstreaming

There are a range of opportunities and approaches for mainstreaming biodiversity in these sectors, involving a range of actors. These include actions that can be taken through international processes, at the national level, by the business sector, the financial and banking sectors, and other actors to increase the mainstreaming of biodiversity in these sectors.

At the national level, actions for mainstreaming biodiversity may be usefully grouped into a number of categories, including the following:

- (a) strategic national planning (economic, development, etc.);
- (b) policies, law and regulations;
- (c) incentive measures;
- (d) spatial planning across landscapes and seascapes;
- (e) measures at the scale of the site or production plant;
- (f) supply-chain measures.

Conclusion

There is no question that integrating biodiversity values into other sectors and in cross-cutting policies is essential to achieve the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, as well as economic, social and development goals. With only two years left to implement this Strategic Plan, efforts must be significantly increased.



Mainstreaming biodiversity recognizes the critical role of biodiversity in human well-being and will move us on a path that secures our future.